

These views are curiously unanimous, despite their very wide differences in date. True, others do not see us quite as we are: their contact makes us feel shyer, and seem grimmer, than normal. But it remains also true that we take life and ourselves, very often, too seriously. Arnold had surely reason when he complained that Carlyle, thrusting earnestness on the English, was carrying coals to Newcastle; and Dante Gabriel Rossetti, when he teased Christina with neglecting art because it 'interfered with the legitimate exercise of anguish'. One of the cardinal deficiencies of our life and literature, as contrasted with French, is a certain lack of grace and gaiety. Johnson's *Rasselas* is a fine thing; but the world has always preferred its typically French counterpart, which a curious coincidence brought to birth in the same year, 1759—Voltaire's *Candide*. The English Heraclitus and the French Democritus agree in essentials; but men turn to the laughing philosopher.

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The other age-old charge against us is that of hypocrisy. This, too, is exaggerated; but it has only too good foundation. The truth is not so much that we are innocent, as that the charge is wrongly worded. We are not hypocrites in the strict sense—Tartuffes deliberately and consciously counterfeiting virtues that we know we do not possess or want to possess. The English are merely

intellectually dishonest, and highly skilled at
deceiving
themselves; it is one more example of their
instinctive
practicality; it enables them to behave as
ill as their
interests require, without even being
demoralised by
pangs of conscience. When the City of
London protested,
i& *753> against the naturalisation of the
Jews, 'as tending
extremely to the dishonour of the Christian
religion, and
extremely injurious to the interests and
commerce of the
Kingdom in general, and of the City of
London in